

VZCZCXRO3100

OO RUEHAG RUEHAO RUEHCD RUEHGD RUEHGO RUEHMC RUEHNG RUEHNL RUEHRD
RUEHROV RUEHRS RUEHSL RUEHSR RUEHTM
DE RUEHCV #1545/01 3442331
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O R 102331Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0133
INFO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 001545

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/12/10

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: OAS Visit Ends Student Hunger Strike; Student Confrontation
in Tachira Results in a Death

REF: 09 CARACAS 1523; 09 CARACAS 1489; 09 CARACAS 1389
09 CARACAS 1292; 09 CARACAS 1279; 09 CARACAS 1269

CLASSIFIED BY: DUDDY, AMBASSADOR, DOS, AMB; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Student activist Julio Rivas claimed victory and ended his 18-day hunger strike on December 8 after a visit to Caracas by an OAS team that listened to the students' concerns and announced a January 2010 visit to Venezuela by OAS Secretary General Insulza. In a separate incident in the border state of Tachira, week-long student protests against electrical and gasoline shortages led to a December 8 armed confrontation involving students from two universities and the National Guard, resulting in the death of a student, Jesus Ramirez Bello. Students throughout the country mounted protests over his killing on December 9. End Summary.

OAS Visit Ends Hunger Strike

¶2. (SBU) On December 8, a three-person delegation from the Organization of American States (OAS) arrived in Caracas to meet with students who had been on a hunger strike since November 21 (ref a). The students' demand had been for a visit by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (CIDH) to assess the situation of human rights and political prisoners in Venezuela. This OAS delegation was composed of the OAS Secretary General's Senior Advisor Antonia Urrejola, staffer Rodrigo Zubieta, and the OAS' resident doctor, Rodrigo Hurtado. The delegation met with the students, accepted the human rights documentation they had prepared, spoke by telephone with several political prisoners, including the Prefect of Caracas Richard Blanco (ref b), and announced that OAS Secretary General Insulza planned to visit Caracas in January 2010. The delegation left the same day. Lawyers for the students stressed to the press that this visit had been authorized by the Venezuelan government.

¶3. (SBU) Based on this visit, student activist Julio Rivas claimed that their demand for an OAS visit had been met and that they would end their hunger strike. Rivas said, "This is our gift of hope for those who have suffered human rights abuses. They can

be certain that this hunger strike concludes with our objectives being achieved. This is an example that with conviction we can reach our goals, no matter how hard they seem to be. Through unity we can rescue (our) democratic values and principles."

¶4. (C) On December 9, the students' lawyer Alfredo Romero told Poloff that the students considered the hunger strike a success since they achieved four goals: (1) Article 18 of the Inter-American Charter was successfully applied for the first time in Venezuelan history, resulting in the authorization by the CIDH of an official delegation to visit the country; (2) a three-person official delegation was admitted to the country and gathered human rights documentation; (3) the delegation spoke by phone with several political prisoners, including Jose Alberto Sanchez Montiel and Richard Blanco, and spoke with the relatives of prisoners Eligio Cedenio and Delfin Parra; and (4) the students received a commitment from Secretary General Insulza to visit the country in January 2010. According to Romero the students' next move will be a series of protests calling for the resignation of Interior and Justice Minister Tarek El Aissami.

¶5. (U) Venezuelan media on December 9 reported the statement
CARACAS 00001545 002 OF 003

issued by Secretary General Insulza in Washington that stressed that his goal had been to end the hunger strike both for the students' welfare as well as to establish a "normal framework" for reestablishing a dialogue with the Venezuelan government regarding a possible visit by the CIDH. Insulza's statement also clarified that his visit to Venezuela "would take place in a more general context in the near future on a date I hope to set directly with Venezuelan authorities through the appropriate channels to analyze various matters of mutual interest."

Student Killed During Protests in Tachira

¶6. (SBU) National Experimental University of Tachira (UNMET) engineering student Jesus Ramirez Bello died December 8 from a gunshot wound to the head that he received during a face-off between UNMET and pro-government students from the Bolivarian University of Venezuela. National Guardsmen were reportedly present during the confrontation. Eleven other students were injured. The UNMET students were protesting the wounding by gunmen of a student the week before during demonstrations over shortages of gasoline, water, and electricity. Media reports indicated that officers from the Scientific, Penal, and Criminal Police (CICPC) who arrived to investigate the shooting were chased away by masked persons in red shirts. (Note: Red is the color worn by Chavez and his supporters. End Note.)

¶7. (SBU) In a December 8 interview on the official Venezuelan Television (VTV), Minister of Interior and Justice Tarek El-Aissami blamed Bello's death on the "bad performance" of the Tachira State Police. El-Aissami accused the police of cordoning off the area and letting students fight it out and asserted that opposition Tachira State Governor Perez Vivas behaved in a "negligent," "fascist," and "destabilizing manner." El-Aissami said he would decide "in a few hours" whether or not to suspend the Tachira State Police. Governor Perez Vivas has counter-charged that armed groups linked to the government were responsible for Bello's death. On December 10, both the television and print media showed an image of a youth wearing a mask and shooting into the

crowd of students.

Comment

18. (C) Student protests continue to percolate throughout the country on issues ranging from political prisoners to electrical and water rationing. With public opinion highly sympathetic to the student movement, the GBRV appears willing to take some steps to keep the movement from building momentum. In October, for example, the GBRV released Rivas from prison just as the student hunger strike calling for his release was gaining adherents. Now, the GBRV permitted a relatively low-level OAS delegation to visit, for one day and with a very limited mandate, in order to end this second hunger strike. While the students are claiming a victory, nothing much has changed, other than a half-hearted promise by Insulza to visit Venezuela to discuss a range of issues.

19. (C) The death of the Tachira student provides the GBRV yet another pretext for "intervening" the Tachira State Police,

CARACAS 00001545 003 OF 003

something President Chavez has urged since the November 2 killing of two National Guardsmen along the border. Chavez has long sought to undermine, if not depose, opposition Tachira Governor Perez Vivas by accusing him of treasonous collaboration with Colombian paramilitaries and of failure to maintain order in his state.
DUDDY